

“More or Less Hardened to Turmoil” 1950–1955

C. A. Hamilton, 1950

The concessioners began the new decade with almost as much uncertainty as they had experienced in late 1941. A threat of war loomed in Korea, the Department of Commerce’s National Production Authority imposed a national policy of limited building and the National Park Service issued a new concessions policy. The new policy not only made business decisions more difficult, but also angered the concessioners.

Hamilton outlined his grievances in a letter to Director Drury in January 1950. Upset over the delays in approval for his West Thumb building design and then for a definite location to erect a modern store at West Thumb, he told Director Drury that it was difficult to get financing without a proper lease. He listed several other issues, including the high price of electrical power compared to rates in the surrounding communities and cancellation of his lease on the Old Faithful swimming pool.¹ In a letter to Jack Haynes he wrote, “You relieved me some time ago as ‘Peck’s Bad Boy,’ and as the time is fast approaching the expiration of my lease, will once more enter the fight and take you off the limb, as I am more or less hardened to turmoil.”² Within a few days, the normally agreeable Haynes responded:

Thanks for your letter of January 26 and the copy of your letter to Director Drury, which I have read with great interest and I hope that you, being brighter than I am, will be able to get these things across with the government. I have been three or four years trying to nego-

ciate a contract that Mr. Albright and I could have negotiated in two hours, but, as you know, we have not finished it yet.

We will be glad to go along with you on the question of power and propane, but I think that the government officials are enveloped in a mood of frustration and are being carried along by the urgent needs of the task they are attempting to perform, instead of raising the leadership level, which should enable them to direct answers to the problems confronting them. They are floating upstream instead of downstream and do not have the guts enough to help row.

The above analysis is not quoted from Kiplinger—it is from the Public Relations Department of Haynes Studios, Inc., of Bozeman, Montana.³

Nichols was encouraged with newly appointed Secretary of the Interior Oscar Chapman’s attitude toward the concessioners. Nichols had heard that Chapman did not endorse the limits on the concessioners’ profits to six percent and he “was favorable to a discussion of a Bill which we might introduce in Congress which would give us more protection than we now have on our equity in Park property.” But several concessioners from the West met with Chapman and Director Drury, and it was reported that Chapman said:

I want it understood that, from now on, the National Park Service is going to run the national parks and not keep running to me about them.⁴

Before the 1950 season started, the Yellowstone Park Company received permission to change the official name of “Camp Roosevelt” to “Roosevelt Lodge” because Nichols believed that it now operated like a lodge facility.⁵ The park requested that the term “filling station” be changed to “service station.”⁶

The Yellowstone Park Company started the new decade with plans to concentrate on the Lake improvements, beginning with the construction of cottages behind the hotel. Following the advice of the park landscape architect, the company made changes to the approved pre-war cabin plans by adding a bathroom and adjusting the height of the chimneys. The company wanted to build pre-fabricated units using processed logs that were seven inches in diameter with a flat surface on the inside. The buildings would be placed on a concrete floor that had a three-inch curb for the wall support and would be covered with a plastic flooring of some type. The nearly flat roof would be built up and covered with gravel. Frank Mattson, the park landscape architect, liked the low cost per unit and the possibility of building multiple-unit structures (which would conserve space as opposed to the single cabins), but he was concerned about some technical aspects of the buildings and thought that “the modern style seemed to lack the permanence and durability which to my way of observation is the greatest weakness of most modern dwelling designs.” The company and the park compromised, and the company agreed to build a few experimental cabins.⁷ Child did not plan to build the new type of cabin until 1951, but he agreed with the park that multiple-unit structures would be just as acceptable. He told the park that in addition to the Lake Hotel cabins, the company would focus its efforts at Fishing Bridge in 1951.⁸

Recognizing that the Yellowstone Park Company’s building program would be extensive for the next few years, the superintendent thought that a “thorough and complete study to establish good designs and standards [must be done] before commencing work.”⁹

The company did plan to construct cottages at Lake Hotel during 1950 with material on hand. In a letter to the regional director, Superintendent Rogers used the term “cottage” instead of “cabin” to distinguish it from the cabins at the Lake Lodge.¹⁰ An-

other company project at Lake was the repainting of the hotel and cottages. Superintendent Rogers approved painting the hotel “the original” yellow with white trim. He advised that the “intensity of brightness should not be any greater than the original wet paint used and preferably less intense or bright.” Rogers also approved the color scheme for the cottages:

The major portions of those cottages now built will be painted a Colonial yellow with a light yellow trim. This color would reach east to cottage 7-C.

Single cottage trim: light yellow; verge, rafter ends, rafter face, under porch ends, door frame and window.

Body: Colonial yellow same as hotel, all walls, gable face, under gable roof, base and door.

Double cottage: Same as single room cottage except that the corner posts will be painted the trim color.

Cottage east of 7-C will be painted soft green comparable to what we are now calling the “Tower Falls Green,” but somewhat richer in tone. The trim will be determined on ground and a light shade of green is favored. The zone of the cottages to be painted green will be included in the east end of the southern block and the two eastern most blocks. Cottages west of the plaza will remain the Yellowstone gray with doors of different colors...Labor dormitories are to be painted the Tower Falls green.¹¹

Most of the improvements at Lake were in the hotel area, but a stationary bar for serving liquor, similar to ones at Old Faithful and Canyon, was constructed in the Lake Lodge.¹²

In October, Secretary Chapman issued a statement on concessions policies that superseded all previous policies. He began his statement by acknowledging that the Organic Act of 1916 prescribed both preservation and use of the parks. In order to balance these two objectives, the policy would be:

to permit the development of accommodations within the areas...only to the extent that such

accommodations are necessary and appropriate for the public use and enjoyment of the areas, consistent with their preservation and conservation. Where adequate accommodations exist or can be developed by private enterprise outside of such areas, accommodations shall not be provided within the areas.¹³

In addition to requiring concessioners to provide a “reasonable proportion of their accommodations as low-priced accommodations,” the Secretary also reassured the Yellowstone concessioners with this section:

Where public accommodations are necessary for the enjoyment of an area and the basic facilities with which to provide such accommodations and services cannot be provided by private capital, it shall be the policy of the Department to provide such basic facilities... There is no intention that the Government should operate Government-owned concession facilities... It is the desire of the Department to assure the concessioners of the security of their investments in buildings, structures, and other improvements provided by them on Federally owned lands...¹⁴

Despite all of the tension surrounding the changes in concession policy, personal relationships between concessions and the National Park Service seemed to remain cordial as exemplified by a letter from Director Drury to William Nichols, which began, “My dear Billie,” and went on to say that he will probably include Yellowstone in an upcoming trip as “there is always something important going on there and I like to keep in touch.”¹⁵

By midsummer, the potential international crisis in Korea began to affect business in the park. Nichols was anxious to get approval for the girls’ dormitory at Lake so that they could order materials before a sudden drop in visitation and revenue might prevent him from having the building ready for the 1951 season.¹⁶ Other major decisions for 1950 were the demolition of the Mammoth Lodge and Mammoth swimming pool.¹⁷

Just before the season closed, Nichols received a request to convert the transportation division’s repair garage in Gardiner into a manufacturing plant for war material. National Park Service Acting Director Paul Franke, who thought the possibility of the park

being closed during 1951 season premature at that point, opposed the “conversion to a use that is so foreign to the purpose for which the Park was established, except in case of dire [national] emergency.”¹⁸ By the end of October, Nichols advised Pete Hoffman, manager of the Transportation Division, “On account of the present international situation and the uncertainty as to what may happen between now and the opening of the Park season next year, it seems essential that we curtail our activities as much as possible at this time.” Nichols added that if the situation with Russia should worsen, the same kind of restrictions experienced in World War II might go into effect.¹⁹

Hamilton, also worried about the Korean situation, hesitated to pour more money into his Old Faithful swimming pool until he had an extension on his lease. Based on his recent experience with the park’s planning process, he was a little suspicious of the “master planning process” due to a bad experience he had had earlier: one Master Plan had located his Old Faithful auto camp on one location, then in the next Master Plan, the road had been moved behind his store and station. He said he had “heard rumblings of a super-Master Plan that is underway!”, so he hoped an extension would be granted until “their Master Plans are definitely arrived at and world conditions are on a more settled basis.”²⁰

In 1951, the following facilities were in place in the park:



Mammoth swimming pool. 1912.

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|---------------------|-----------|----------------------------|
| Mammoth Hotel | 98 rooms | 196 capacity |
| Mammoth Cottages | 129 rooms | 272 capacity |
| Mammoth Camp | 154 rooms | 433 capacity |
| Canyon Hotel | 353 rooms | 700 capacity |
| Canyon Lodge | 265 rooms | 710 capacity |
| Canyon Camp | 140 rooms | 430 capacity |
| Old Faithful Inn | 338 rooms | 750 capacity |
| Old Faithful Lodge | 278 rooms | 815 capacity |
| Old Faithful Camp | 417 rooms | 1,188 capacity |
| Lake Hotel | 196 rooms | 433 capacity |
| Lake Lodge | 169 rooms | 450 capacity |
| Lake Hotel cottages | 64 rooms | 192 capacity |
| Fishing Bridge | 298 rooms | 955 capacity |
| Roosevelt Lodge | 92 rooms | 313 capacity |
| West Thumb Cabins | 60 rooms | 195 capacity ²¹ |

The Yellowstone Park Company outlined ambitious construction plans for 1951: 48 new guest cottages at Lake Hotel, a tourist cabin office, a dormitory and shower, and seven quad cabins and one double cabin at Old Faithful. Still experiencing the effects of World War II, the company's plans were denied by the National Production Authority. Huntley Child appealed the decision and explained to the agency that because no construction had been done during the war years, nor after the war when materials and labor were rationed, the company and the National Park Service had developed a building program of which this was one project. The project, which had already received National Park Service approval, was scheduled to begin as soon as weather allowed. Child emphasized the need for the improvements, citing prewar visitation figures of 580,000 visitors compared to the current figure of 1,110,000 visitors. He also stressed the importance the park played in the morale of the country and noted that the company had a substantial amount of the needed materials on hand. Despite these arguments and some Congressional pressure, the projects were again rejected. Then, without explanation and far beyond the time they could initiate construction in the Yellowstone climate, the Yellowstone Park Company received permission to begin the project.²²

Early in 1951, Secretary Chapman asked for the resignation of Director Drury, and he then appointed Arthur Demaray to the post. Hamilton remarked in a letter to Haynes, "I always liked Drury personally even though he did nothing apparently to help me save the pool from demolition"—to which Haynes responded that he "could write a book-of-the-month best seller

about the idiosyncrasies of the Krug-Davidson administration of the Service, but I of course like yourself am too much of a gentleman." Haynes, always the optimist, ended his note, "Indications are that, if Truman kicks Stalin out, travel will be as good as last year."²³

In May 1951, the National Park Service Chief of Concessions Management in Washington, Donald Lee, and his assistant, George Hartzog, Jr., were as they put it, "in the need of considerable 'seasoning' in the operational aspect of concessions." As the agency grew, and many of the older employees left or retired, the Washington office found "our information seems...to be rather sketchy and incomplete which led to the need for comprehensive information as to the amount of number of buildings, grounds leased, types of improvements, utility facilities, values of improvements and other necessary information in order to negotiate new leases." Lee and Hartzog felt that the report submitted by Assistant Superintendent Fred Johnston on the Hamilton Stores' history and business could be used as a model.²⁴

In 1951, the question of the admission of "casual tours" and chartered buses came before the National Park Service. In parks without transportation companies, this was not an issue; but, it was an issue in parks with these companies, such as Yellowstone, Yosemite, and the Grand Canyon. Arthur Demaray, who served as National Park Service Director only for a short time, protected the transportation companies' interests by not allowing the organized tours.²⁵ Conrad Wirth succeeded Arthur Demaray as director in 1951.

In 1952, the service stations in Yellowstone (owned jointly by Hamilton Stores and the Yellowstone Park Company), under contract with Continental Oil Company for gasoline and supplies, implemented new policies in order to meet customer expectations. The companies increased the pay for employees, initiated a training program, emphasized hiring older and more experienced managers, and planned the installation of telephones at the stations. After much discussion, Director Wirth announced that the Conoco credit card, as well as other credit cards Conoco recognized at its stations, would be accepted in Yellowstone beginning in the 1953 season. Wirth pointed out that "service station credit is now standard practice practically everywhere in the United States, and the traveling public has come to expect such service."²⁶



Service Station at Mammoth Hot Springs. 1951.

In December 1952, Hamilton approached the superintendent about his plans for building “a most modern filling station at Tower Falls.” The park, however, favored a Tower Junction location. Unfortunately, officials could not authorize a site until the question of relocating of the intersection of the Grand Loop Road and the Northeast Entrance Road was settled, a problem they had had earlier.²⁷

Before the year ended, Hamilton purchased Anna Pryor and Elizabeth Trischman’s business in the park for \$333,000. He decided to wait until after the new Secretary of the Interior was in office January 20, 1953, before negotiating his new lease. In a letter to Superintendent Rogers, Hamilton wrote, “perhaps it might be well to consider the Hamilton Stores lease around that time when there might be a change in the general policy, as I want to be at peace with all concerned.”²⁸ In January 1952, Haynes signed a new contract with the Department of the Interior covering the period January 1, 1951 to December 31, 1970.²⁹

The Western Conference of National Park Concessioners, which met in Washington in March 1953, received reassurances from the new Secretary of the Interior, Douglas McKay, that he “strongly favored a policy of private enterprise” and would not vary much from former Secretary Chapman’s policy statement of 1950. However, if needed policy changes did arise, he would refer them to “Assistant Secretary Orme Lewis and Director Wirth to work out with the concessioners and that he, Secretary McKay, would act as referee in the event that became necessary.” Wirth announced that the 1935 ban on the sale of foreign-made curios by concessioners would be lifted.³⁰

In recent years, the National Park Service had made efforts to have franchise fees deposited into special fund accounts to be used for improvements in the parks. However, the Attorney General ruled against this idea in January 1953 and directed Director Conrad Wirth to tell the concessioners to forward all franchise fees to the United States Treasury. Disappointed with the ruling, Director Wirth promoted a new bill in Congress that would allow the franchise fees to be used through a special account for developing and improving roads, walks, parking areas, and utilities. The concessioners opposed the bill, stating that their franchise fees were insignificant in comparison to the National Park Service entrance fees, which also went into the general treasury. Wirth was disappointed by the concessioners’ lack of support. He needed to secure more appropriations for improvement in the parks.³¹

About the same time the Attorney General denied use of franchise fees, Congressman William Harrison of Wyoming called for an investigation of concessions in the parks. The concessioners did not believe that Congressman Harrison was antagonistic toward them; thus, at their annual meeting they took no action on this pending investigation. Wirth, also interested in seeing an investigation develop, believed that an investigation by a private industrial engineering firm would be more meaningful than one by a committee of Congressmen. Wirth was not interested in a complete report on each concessioner, but wanted a comprehensive look at charges for operations, franchise fees, construction needs, problems of rate control, and financing needs. Wirth, a landscape architect by training and a planner by experience, naturally

tended toward a holistic approach to the concessions needs for the system.³² Perhaps, this was the beginning of the idea for Mission 66.

In Yellowstone, coordination between the National Park Service improvement program and the concessioners was managed through the Master Planning process. By the end of 1953, the Yellowstone Park Company had agreed to assume the cost of new development at the Lake Lodge based upon the park completing the street surfacing, curbing, and water and sewer lines up to the buildings. The work, which would begin in 1954 and be completed in 1955–56, involved rehabilitating 84 cabins (including new foundations and relocation), constructing 112 new cabins, and relocating (and rehabilitating) 55 cabins to Fishing Bridge. Because the company had recently spent \$125,000 for a new girls' dormitory at the lodge (in 1950 and 1951) and funded a new foundation and floors for the Lake Lodge lobby in 1952–53, the Yellowstone Park Company stipulated that these Lake Lodge projects were based upon its receiving a new 20-year contract to replace the current one that was to expire December 31, 1955.³³

The cost of the Lake project and the other Yellowstone Park Company project at Canyon was estimated to be \$1.5 million over the next five years. At Canyon, the plans called for an all-new-motor-lodge facility, including a new main building with lobby, dining room, and cafeteria, and recreation hall. New cabins with a total of 300 rooms would be built, and existing cabins would be moved to the new "village area" and used for lower cost accommodations and employee housing.³⁴

Just after the New Year of 1954, Huntley Child, Jr., and his architect, Fred Willson, met with park officials to discuss the proposed Canyon project. All agreed that the buildings should be "modern rustic," a term Child said they invented. He was emphatic that it was not to be like the Jackson Lake Lodge, designed by Old Faithful Lodge architect, Gilbert Stanley Underwood. They also favored a flat roof for the buildings, as Child believed it tended to reduce snow shoveling.³⁵

Hamilton called the Canyon project a "mess" and stated that he would not build there until the Yellowstone Park Company had started its facilities. The two companies agreed to build a joint messhouse for all of the employees if the park agreed.³⁶

Hamilton and William "Billie" Nichols both celebrated their 50th anniversaries in the park in 1954. Hamilton said that after "educating and hounding" Trevor Povah and Gar Helppie through the years, they "will probably do a better job than I."³⁷ By this time, Hamilton had begun to turn over his operation to his son-in-law, Trevor Povah.

By 1954, Americans were increasingly vacationing with their own travel trailers. Since the end of World War II, visitors bringing house trailers to the park had increased significantly; in 1954, 6,332 trailers entered the park. In response to this change, Trevor Povah began investigating commercial trailer camp layouts and plans. Povah's idea was "for a camp with complete up-to-date facilities for fifty trailers, but which could be expanded, should the need arise, and still retain its architectural unity and integrity." He asked National Park Service landscape architect Tho-



Lake Lodge lobby. 1953.



Canyon Lodge. 1958.

mas Vint if the National Park Service had any such plans. Vint explained that concession-operated trailer camps in parks “has [sic] just started becoming a reality this year.” He told Povah that a few such camps had been installed in southwestern parks, but that the agency really did not have sufficient knowledge about providing utilities or the number of sites that produced an economical unit. Director Wirth had recently approved Vint’s proposal to send a landscape architect across the south from Florida to California to study existing trailer camps and produce a booklet for distribution to the parks.³⁸

On a related issue, well before the 1955 season began, Povah, with the park’s approval, planned to install liquefied petroleum gas dispensing plants at the rear of and adjacent to the Old Faithful and Fishing Bridge service stations. Previously, visitors had to obtain butane or propane from Gardiner or West Yellowstone in order to cook or heat their trailers.³⁹

Another new trend with long-term implications in the park, was the use of snowmobiles in the winter. In October 1955, John Nichols, vice-president of the Yellowstone Park Company, notified a company named “Snowmobiles of West Yellowstone” that, subject to conditions set by the park, the Yellowstone Park Company did not object to operating snowmobiles between West Yellowstone and Old Faithful for the 1955–56 winter season.⁴⁰

The Canyon Village development was the major focus for the concessioners and park staff during 1955. While it had been thought that Lake would be the top priority, Canyon seemed to move in front. The Yellowstone Park Company hired Beckett and Associates of Los Angeles as the architects and McNeil and Company as contractors. Superintendent Rogers



Canyon Lodge cabins. 1958.

advised both Haynes and Hamilton that the Yellowstone Park Company’s design, which would be determined during the winter of 1954–55 in consultation with the National Park Service Western Office of Design and Construction in San Francisco, will “have a great deal of influence” on what concessioners could build. Hamilton planned on building the same style of store that he had at Fishing Bridge, except that the design at Canyon would be modern. Hamilton also notified the park that he would be submitting his service station drawings soon.⁴¹

The Yellowstone Park Company, whose contract expired at the end of 1955, began its renewal process in April 1954 when William Nichols asked Director Wirth whether a draft contract had been written. Wirth responded that “it would be necessary to sit down and talk over a number of points to be incorporated in a new contract, one of which was the need for a comprehensive development program.”⁴² One of the points to be discussed was Regional Director Howard Baker’s belief that a concessioner should be required to provide some of the utilities and road work within its developed areas.⁴³

Concurrently with trying to negotiate a new contract, Nichols offered the company for sale. Early in 1955, the Wyoming legislature authorized \$50,000 for a study to assess the practicality of the state taking over the concession operations in Yellowstone. Many issues complicated the plan, including the federal legislation a state needed to run an operation in a national park, the fact that any price agreed upon by Wyoming and the Yellowstone Park Company required approval by the Secretary of the Interior, and the fact that Wyoming would need to sell bonds to purchase and run the concessions. Needless to say, that plan

fell through.⁴⁴

By the end of 1955, a contract between the Yellowstone Park Company and the government finally seemed complete, with only Congressional approval now needed. In the new contract, the company agreed to spend \$3.5 million during the first five years of the 20-year contract at Canyon, Lake, and other locations. Additionally, within the first 10 years construction would take place at Grant Village and Bridge Bay, if needed and economically feasible.⁴⁵

Again the tension between business and a government process surfaced when the contract was de-

layed in being sent to Congress for a required 60-day review. With a projected busy construction year for 1956, any delay caused by protracted hearings after Congress reconvened could delay awarding construction contracts and starts. The contract cleared the Department of the Interior and was sent to Congress on December 1. The House Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs scheduled hearings for January 6, 1956. Finally, after a delay instigated by senators O'Mahoney and Barrett of Wyoming in the Senate Committee, the contract was executed on February 3.⁴⁶